# The Impact of Perceived Value on Word-of-Mouth Among Generation Z Consumers in the Apparel Industry within an Omnichannel Shopping Environment Evidence from Henan Province, China

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**Abstract**

With the rapid advancement of digital technology, the concept of omnichannel retailing has emerged, and against this backdrop, consumer behavior has undergone profound changes. Perceived value serves as a crucial foundation for retailers to understand consumer behavior and gain competitive advantages. However, within the context of omnichannel retailing, the underlying psychological mechanisms through which perceived value influences consumer behavior—particularly word-of-mouth behavior—remain insufficiently explored. This study focuses on the Generation Z apparel consumers in Henan Province, China. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey from 466 omnichannel apparel consumers and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via AMOS software to test the proposed theoretical hypotheses. Findings reveal that flow experiences and perceived privacy risks mediate the influence of perceived value on word-of-mouth behavior, though their mediating effects differ in strength. This research provides theoretical support for apparel companies seeking to optimize omnichannel shopping experiences and proactively guide consumer word-of-mouth behavior.

**Keywords:** Omnichannel Retail, Consumer Perceived Value, Word-of-Mouth, Flow Experience, Perceived Privacy Risk

## Introduction

With the rapid advancement of digital technologies, consumer shopping behavior has undergone significant changes, giving rise to the concept of omnichannel retailing (Rigby, 2011). Omnichannel retailing refers to the integration and coordination of multiple channels and customer touchpoints within a brand ecosystem to optimize the customer experience and enhance firm performance (Verhoef et al., 2015). In this context, Consumers exhibit more diversified shopping behaviors, flexibly making purchase decisions across multiple channels. Consequently, retailers are adopting omnichannel strategies to maintain competitiveness and create differentiated customer value. However, despite the expanding practice of omnichannel commerce, research on customer experience and its underlying processes is still scarce, presenting an important potential to better examine consumer behavior in the omnichannel setting.

China's retail market is developing rapidly, with e-commerce retail operations experiencing particularly swift growth.While the market boasts significant scale and growth rates, it exhibits low concentration and uneven consumption patterns, with pronounced regional disparities (Ye et al., 2018). Henan, as a representative submarket, exhibits distinct omnichannel retail drivers or barriers compared to developed economies. In addition, the apparel business is thought to be a key area for retail transformation because of its short cycles, high volatility, and erratic demand.Simultaneously, Generation Z consumers exhibit high technology acceptance and prefer personalization, experiential shopping, and social engagement (Nagy et al., 2024), driving enterprises to explore omnichannel models. Therefore, grounded in current new retail practices, selecting Generation Z consumers in Henan Province's

apparel industry as the research subjects to deeply explore consumer behavior characteristics under omnichannel retailing holds significant value.

Customer Perceived Value (CPV) constitutes a critical foundation for retailers in understanding consumer behavior and securing competitive advantage. Conceptually, CPV reflects consumers' evaluation of the trade-off between the benefits and costs associated with products or services, thereby shaping their overall value assessment (Zeithaml, 1988). A higher overall value has been shown to foster greater satisfaction, repurchase intention, and word-of-mouth behavior (Vieira, 2013). Nevertheless, the mediating processes through which CPV influences word-of-mouth remain insufficiently understood. In particular, the potential roles of flow experience and perceived privacy risk in linking CPV to word-of-mouth have received limited scholarly attention. Extant studies have largely emphasized the effect of a single mediator, often neglecting the possibility of multiple mediation effects. More specifically, systematic investigation into the interplay among CPV, flow experience, and perceived privacy risk is still absent from the literature.Building on existing research,The following objectives are addressed by the study:

1. To study how flow experience functions as a mediator between the omnichannel purchasing journey's word-of-mouth behavior and the utilitarian, hedonistic, and social aspects of customer perceived value.

2. To study how perceived privacy risk functions as a mediator between word-of-mouth and customer perceived value (utilitarian, hedonic, social) in the context of omnichannel buying.

## Literature Review

### Consumer Perceived Value (CPV)

Consumer Perceived Value (CPV) is defined as the trade-off between the benefits of a product and the sacrifices perceived by customers (Zeithaml, 1988). In the context of omnichannel shopping, consumers seek to leverage the advantages of multiple channels to obtain an integrated shopping, entertainment, and social experience. Among its dimensions, utilitarian value emphasizes the achievement of goals through the efficient allocation of time or effort resources. Channel integration in an omnichannel environment not only reduces the costs of information search and comparison but also lowers economic and cognitive burdens through cross-channel promotions (Chang & Geng, 2022). The pleasure and engagement that come from purchasing is referred to as hedonic value. Omnichannel shopping enables consumers to switch freely between modes, such as ordering online and picking up offline or virtually experiencing physical stores, while emerging technologies like AR/VR further enhance immersion and enjoyment (Zhang et al., 2024). Social value stems from social support and self-enhancement. Through social media, consumers can share shopping experiences, seek advice, and present their self-image at any time (Salem & Alanadoly, 2024). Overall, the convenience, enjoyment, and social fulfillment provided by omnichannel shopping strengthen consumer immersion, thereby fostering a state of flow.

### Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) is commonly defined as non-commercial communication among consumers regarding a specific brand, product, or service, encompassing not only face-to-face verbal interactions but also various indirect or mediated forms of communication (Westbrook, 1987). Previous studies have shown that consumers' propensity to participate in WOM activities is significantly increased when they have a flow experience. Customers who are in a stronger state of flow when they purchase online are more likely to willingly promote the product to others and actively share their shopping experiences and product-related information on digital networks. Accordingly, the flow experience of customers may be a significant mechanism impacting the connection between

perceived value and WOM behavior in an omnichannel retail setting. Given the increasing integration of online and offline channels, examining how flow experience shapes this relationship is essential for understanding consumer engagement and for developing effective strategies to promote positive WOM communication.

**Flow Theory**

According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), flow is the total experience people have when they are totally absorbed in an activity. Since its inception, flow has been widely used in research on word-of-mouth behavior and is frequently considered a key mediating variable that connects exterior user cues to behavioral reactions. According to flow theory, people attain a state of flow when they are fully involved in a task and feel a great deal of delight and focus. Given that flow, or the best possible experience, is a crucial aspect of the customer experience in omnichannel settings, it could be a crucial precondition for word-of-mouth.In general, customers who are in a state of flow are more inclined to promote products and share their buying experiences. To put it another way, we suggest that when customers are in a state of flow when utilizing goods or services in omnichannel purchasing settings, they are more inclined to share their positive experiences with others.

Based on the above research, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Omnichannel utilitarian value positively influences flow experience.

H3: Omnichannel hedonic value positively influences flow experience.

H5: Omnichannel social value positively influences flow experience.

H7: Flow experience positively influences consumer word-of-mouth.

H9: The relationship between omnichannel utilitarian value and customer word-of-mouth is mediated by flow experience.

H10: The relationship between omnichannel hedonic value and customer word-of-mouth is mediated by flow experience.

H11: The relationship between omnichannel social value and customer word-of-mouth is mediated by flow experience.

**Perceived Privacy Risk**

Omnichannel retailers collect and track user information across multiple channels to provide consumers with a continuous and seamless shopping experience. While this practice enhances service coherence, it also increases the likelihood of information disclosure and exposure, thereby raising significant concerns regarding privacy protection. Privacy calculus theory posits that individuals' intentions and behaviors in disclosing personal information are determined by a comprehensive evaluation of risks and benefits (Anderson & Agarwal, 2011). Meanwhile, according to hyperbolic discounting theory, individuals tend to prioritize immediate rewards while undervaluing potential future losses (O'Donoghue & Rabin, 1999). Consequently, consumers often focus on short-term benefits while attenuating concerns about future privacy risks. An increase in perceived value may lead users to exhibit an optimistic bias, assuming that privacy breaches primarily affect others, thereby reducing their attention to and perception of privacy. As a result, consumers may be willing to share personal data to gain immediate gratification and enjoy cross-platform personalized services, even when such behavior entails potential privacy risks.

A substantial body of literature has examined the outcome variables of perceived privacy risk, including purchase intention and word-of-mouth behavior (Inman & Nikolova, 2017). Within this context, privacy and security have become central components of consumer-perceived risk. According to reactance theory, when

individuals perceive restrictions, they are typically motivated to seek freedom, often manifesting in attitudes of dissatisfaction and emotions such as anxiety or frustration, as a means to counteract perceived threats. The following theories are put out in this paper in light of the previously mentioned studies:

H2: Omnichannel utilitarian value negatively affects perceived privacy risk.

H4: Omnichannel hedonic value negatively affects perceived privacy risk.

H6: Omnichannel social value negatively affects perceived privacy risk.

H8: Perceived privacy risk directly influences consumers' word-of-mouth.

H12: Perceived privacy risk mediates the relationship between omnichannel utilitarian value and consumers' word-of-mouth behavior.

H13: The association between omnichannel hedonic value and customer word-of-mouth is mediated by perceived privacy risk.

H14: The association between omnichannel social value and customer word-of-mouth is mediated by perceived privacy risk.

## Research Methodology

### Research Sample

The target population of this study is Generation Z consumers aged 20 to 30 in Henan Province, China, who have prior shopping experience in the omnichannel apparel industry. Since the total population size is unknown, the sample size was determined using W.G. Cochran's formula, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error not exceeding 5%. Based on this calculation, a minimum sample size of 385 respondents was deemed necessary.

To guarantee the survey's quality, this study selected participants based on three criteria, given the requirement of omnichannel shopping experience: 1) participants must have engaged in omnichannel shopping within the past year, 2) respondents who experienced omnichannel shopping in a single transaction completed the survey online via the provided link, 3) participants were Generation Z consumers in Henan Province, aged 20-30 years. In this study, a convenience sampling method was implemented through an online questionnaire administered via Wenjuanxing. A total of 458 valid responses were collected for data analysis.

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Stamford International University for the protection of human subjects, in accordance with the Belmont Report and the Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guidelines for social and behavioral research, under approval number STIU-HREC064/2025, certified on September 8, 2025.

### Measurement of Variables

The research data were collected through a survey questionnaire, with measurement items designed around six variables and fourteen hypotheses. Utilitarian value, hedonic value, and social value were adapted from Rintamäki et al. (2006) and Sweeney and Soutar (2001); the scales for flow experience and perceived privacy risk were adopted from Quach et al. (2022); and the word-of-mouth scale was based on Rodríguez-Torrico et al. (2023). A Likert scale with five points was used to measure each item.

## Results

### Reliability Analysis

Table 1 shows that the Cronbach's α for the scales measuring utilitarian value, hedonic value, social value, flow experience, perceived privacy risk, and word-of-mouth ranges from 0.815 to 0.848, all exceeding 0.7, indicating good reliability.The Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CITC) values for each item within the scales are all above 0.4, and removing any item does not increase the respective Cronbach's alpha, indicating that no item deletion is necessary.

The scales' convergent validity is shown in Table 1. All of the items' standardized factor loadings surpass 0.5, as indicated in the table, satisfying the suggested requirement. The Composite Reliability (CR) of all scales exceeds 0.7, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all scales is greater than 0.5, which both show that the scales have satisfactory convergent validity.

**Table 1** Reliability analysis and convergent validity of the scale

| Scale | Item | Corrected Item-Total Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted | Cronbach's Alpha | CR | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Utilitarian Value | UV1 | 0.700 | 0.711 | 0.815 | 0.817 | 0.598 |
| | UV2 | 0.668 | 0.745 | | | |
| | UV3 | 0.633 | 0.780 | | | |
| Hedonic Value | HV1 | 0.668 | 0.757 | 0.820 | 0.820 | 0.603 |
| | HV2 | 0.695 | 0.730 | | | |
| | HV3 | 0.657 | 0.768 | | | |
| Social Value | SV1 | 0.653 | 0.759 | 0.815 | 0.819 | 0.602 |
| | SV2 | 0.629 | 0.784 | | | |
| | SV3 | 0.719 | 0.691 | | | |
| Flow Experience | FE1 | 0.627 | 0.815 | 0.827 | 0.831 | 0.623 |
| | FE2 | 0.744 | 0.701 | | | |
| | FE3 | 0.685 | 0.761 | | | |
| Perceived Privacy Risk | PRE1 | 0.738 | 0.768 | 0.848 | 0.851 | 0.656 |
| | PRE2 | 0.675 | 0.829 | | | |
| | PRE3 | 0.738 | 0.768 | | | |
| Word-of-Mouth | WOM1 | 0.655 | 0.808 | 0.841 | 0.842 | 0.572 |
| | WOM2 | 0.696 | 0.790 | | | |
| | WOM3 | 0.690 | 0.793 | | | |
| | WOM4 | 0.663 | 0.804 | | | |

The discriminant validity table is shown in Table 2. Good discriminant validity between the variables is indicated by the correlation coefficients between the latent variables, all of which are less than the square root of the AVE on the appropriate diagonal.

**Table 2** Discriminant validity table for the scale

| | Utilitarian Value | Hedonic Value | Social Value | Flow Experience | Perceived Privacy Risk | Word-of-Mouth |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Utilitarian Value | 0.773 | | | | | |
| Hedonic Value | 0.526 | 0.777 | | | | |
| Social Value | 0.503 | 0.587 | 0.776 | | | |
| Flow Experience | 0.465 | 0.530 | 0.516 | 0.789 | | |
| Perceived Privacy Risk | -0.447 | -0.463 | -0.371 | -0.478 | 0.810 | |
| Word-of-Mouth | 0.560 | 0.588 | 0.569 | 0.587 | -0.497 | 0.756 |

**Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis**

Based on the reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis, the constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity, indicating that Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) can be conducted. The SEM was constructed using AMOS 24.0, and the resulting path coefficients are presented in Figure 1.

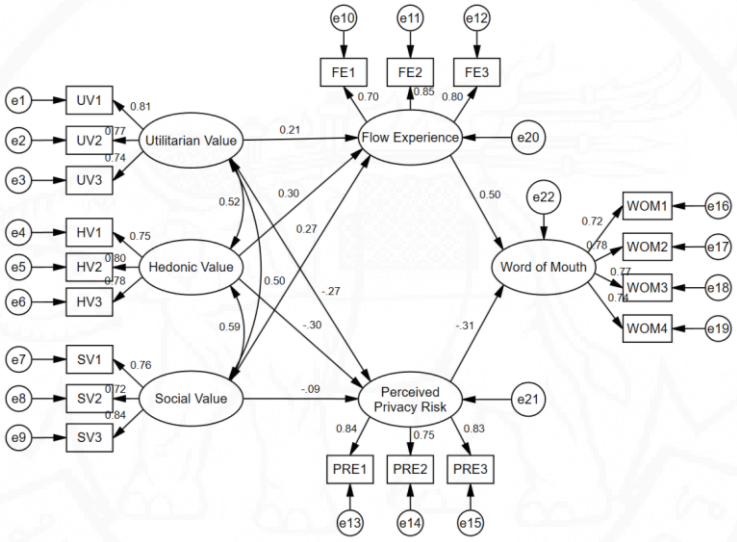


**Figure 1** Structural equation model.

Table 3 presents the model fit indices. As shown in the table, the $\chi^2$/df ratio is 2.039, which is below the recommended threshold of 3. The RMSEA value is 0.047, lower than the cutoff of 0.08. The values for IFI, TLI, CFI, GFI, and AGFI are 0.965, 0.957, 0.965, 0.939, and 0.918, respectively, all exceeding the acceptable level of 0.9. Overall, these indices indicate an adequate fit of the model to the data.

**Table 3** Model fit

| | X2/df | RMSEA | IFI | TLI | CFI | GFI | AGFI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Evaluation Criteria | < 3 | < 0.08 | > 0.9 | > 0.9 | > 0.9 | > 0.9 | > 0.9 |
| Model Fit Results | 2.039 | 0.047 | 0.965 | 0.957 | 0.965 | 0.939 | 0.918 |

Table 4 presents the path analysis results, and Table 5 shows the results of the mediation effect analysis. To ensure a more accurate assessment of the mediation effect, the Bootstrap method was employed with 5,000 resamples. A 95% confidence interval was constructed using the bias-corrected nonparametric percentile approach. As indicated by Tables 4 and 5, all hypotheses are supported except for Hypothesis 6 and Hypothesis 14.

**Table 4** Path analysis

| Hypothesis | | Path | | β | S.E. | C.R. | P | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | Flow Experience | <--- | Utilitarian Value | 0.208 | 0.049 | 3.383 | *** | Supported |
| H2 | Perceived Privacy Risk | <--- | Utilitarian Value | -0.269 | 0.089 | -4.142 | *** | Supported |
| H3 | Flow Experience | <--- | Hedonic Value | 0.300 | 0.064 | 4.349 | *** | Supported |
| H4 | Perceived Privacy Risk | <--- | Hedonic Value | -0.296 | 0.114 | -4.138 | *** | Supported |
| H5 | Flow Experience | <--- | Social Value | 0.265 | 0.056 | 3.978 | *** | Supported |
| H6 | Perceived Privacy Risk | <--- | Social Value | -0.086 | 0.098 | -1.251 | 0.211 | Not Supported |
| H7 | Word of Mouth | <--- | Flow Experience | 0.498 | 0.063 | 8.404 | *** | Supported |
| H8 | Word of Mouth | <--- | Perceived Privacy Risk | -0.306 | 0.032 | -5.919 | *** | Supported |

**Table 5** Mediation effect path analysis

| Mediating Path | Effect Value | SE | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | LLCI | ULCI |
| Utilitarian Value ⟶ Flow Experience ⟶ Word of Mouth | 0.104 | 0.041 | 0.035 | 0.201 |
| Hedonic Value ⟶ Flow Experience ⟶ Word of Mouth | 0.149 | 0.048 | 0.062 | 0.248 |
| Social Value ⟶ Flow Experience ⟶ Word of Mouth | 0.132 | 0.042 | 0.058 | 0.226 |
| Utilitarian Value ⟶ Perceived Privacy Risk ⟶ Word of Mouth | 0.082 | 0.031 | 0.031 | 0.156 |
| Hedonic Value ⟶ Perceived Privacy Risk ⟶ Word of Mouth | 0.091 | 0.033 | 0.039 | 0.172 |
| Social Value ⟶ Perceived Privacy Risk ⟶ Word of Mouth | 0.026 | 0.026 | -0.017 | 0.092 |

## Discussion

This study aims to examine the relationships among omnichannel perceived value, flow experience, perceived privacy risk, and word-of-mouth. With empirical data support, the research objectives were achieved and the hypotheses were validated.This finding extends the application of consumer perceived value theory in the digital and interactive omnichannel retail environment.

First, the study found that utilitarian, hedonic, and social values positively contribute to flow experience, consistent with previous research (Kim & Thapa, 2018). Utilitarian value emphasizes shopping efficiency and resource savings; omnichannel environments, through reasonable pricing, convenient delivery, and smooth processes, immerse consumers and trigger flow. Hedonic value is reflected in the enjoyment and entertainment of shopping, and omnichannel retail enhances immersion and interaction by integrating online and offline touchpoints, fulfilling emotional needs and triggering flow. Social value, through experience sharing and interactive feedback, strengthens group recognition and a sense of belonging, thereby positively influencing flow experience. These results confirm the triggering effect of social value on flow and extend the applicability of perceived value theory in digital retail contexts.

Second, this study confirms that utilitarian and hedonic values have a significant negative effect on perceived privacy risk, supporting the privacy calculus logic and hyperbolic discounting theory (O'Donoghue & Rabin, 1999). In omnichannel environments, features such as cross-platform inventory visibility, integrated checkout, and personalized recommendations enhance consumers' convenience and perceived value, thereby mitigating

concerns over privacy threats. This indicates that when consumers perceive immediate functional benefits, their attention to potential future risks is reduced.

Third, flow experience significantly promotes WOM behavior. This finding aligns with Rodríguez-Torrico et al. (2023), who argue that consumers in a highly immersive state during shopping experience positive emotions and satisfaction, which subsequently translate into repurchase intentions and active WOM. Flow not only represents an intrinsic psychological state but also strengthens emotional connections, increasing customers' willingness to proactively recommend products or services to others.

Meanwhile, the study confirms the negative effect of perceived privacy risk on WOM. When consumers perceive privacy threats arising from data collection, profiling, and cross-platform tracking in omnichannel shopping, they feel their informational autonomy is compromised, triggering psychological reactance. This counter-motivational response leads consumers to avoid using the service or to spread negative WOM as a means to restore a sense of freedom, indicating that privacy concerns weaken consumers' sharing and recommendation intentions.

The mediating effects of perceived privacy risk and flow experience are confirmed by this investigation. In particular, consumers who are surrounded by functional satisfaction, emotional enjoyment, and social connection show higher levels of WOM activity; flow experience is a crucial mediator in the pathways from utilitarian, hedonistic, and social values to WOM. This finding extends Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) flow theory to the omnichannel context. Perceived privacy risk shows a significant indirect effect in the paths from utilitarian and hedonic values to WOM, whereas the mediating effect of social value is not significant.According to this study, positive experiences with utilitarian and hedonistic value reduce perceived risks to autonomy, which in turn reduces the impression of privacy risk and indirectly boosts word-of-mouth (WOM).

Contrary to our theoretical expectations, the path from social value to privacy risk perception was not statistically significant, and privacy risk perception did not mediate the relationship between social value and word-of-mouth behavior. This finding may be partially attributed to the specific characteristics of our sample. All participants in this study were Generation Z consumers, a cohort that has grown up in a digitally saturated environment and has developed deeply habitualized use of social media and online interaction. Prolonged immersion in digital social ecosystems, reinforced through repeated online engagement, may have gradually reduced their sensitivity to associated privacy threats, leading to a cognitive decoupling of social value from privacy risk. This phenomenon aligns with the classic "privacy paradox" observed in digital behavior research: in highly socialized digital contexts, users often express privacy concerns in self-reports, yet their actual behavior tends to reflect adaptive compromise toward privacy risks. Specifically, in the omnichannel setting of this study, Generation Z consumers may perceive social interaction as a foundational infrastructure of digital life rather than a source of risk, thereby systematically attenuating the explanatory power of social value on privacy risk perception.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

This study investigates the mechanism through which consumers' perceived value influences word-of-mouth behavior in the apparel industry within an omnichannel shopping environment, focusing on Gen Z consumers in Henan Province, China, and provides empirical evidence using quantitative methods .The findings align with the research objectives, with key discoveries as follows: First, in an omnichannel shopping environment, in the omnichannel shopping environment, consumers' perceived utilitarian value, perceived hedonic value, and perceived social value all have significant impacts on their word-of-mouth behavior. Utility value and hedonic value exhibit

particularly prominent effects, indicating apparel consumers prioritize both efficiency and practicality while also seeking pleasure and immersive experiences during omnichannel shopping. Second, The mediating role of flow experience was further confirmed. This suggests that when consumers experience heightened focus and pleasure during shopping, they are more inclined to share positive experiences, thereby generating favorable word-of-mouth. Concurrently, perceived privacy risk exerted a negative influence on this relationship, indicating that information security and privacy protection remain critical constraints on word-of-mouth dissemination.

From a theoretical perspective, this study advances research on consumer behavior in omnichannel retailing through three key contributions. First, it extends the contextual boundaries of perceived value theory by revealing the differentiated influence paths of utilitarian, hedonic, and social values in cross-channel integrated environments. Second, it constructs an integrated model of omnichannel word-of-mouth formation by synthesizing flow theory, privacy calculus theory, hyperbolic discounting theory, and psychological reactance theory, thereby expanding the explanatory power of established theories in emerging business models. Finally, it identifies the competing dual-mediation roles of flow experience and privacy risk perception in the "value-word-of-mouth" pathway, moving beyond the single-mediation paradigm and establishing a comprehensive theoretical framework that connects value perception to behavioral outcomes. Together, these findings provide a scalable theoretical foundation for future research on omnichannel consumer behavior.

Furthermore, this study offers practical implications for apparel retailers to optimize omnichannel services, enhance consumer experience, and stimulate word-of-mouth dissemination.The managerial implications for enterprises are as follows: First, enterprises should enhance utilitarian, hedonic, and social values to achieve multidimensional creation of perceived value across channels, thereby comprehensively meeting consumer needs. Second, emphasis should be placed on cultivating flow experiences by optimizing interfaces and personalized interactions to strengthen immersion and brand identification. Third, enterprises need to adopt measures such as technological safeguards, transparent policies, and information autonomy to reduce consumers' perceived privacy risks and consolidate trust. Finally, firms should leverage social interactions and incentive mechanisms to foster positive word-of-mouth communication, with particular attention to the social attributes and sharing preferences of Generation Z. Overall, enterprises must integrate consumer experience, privacy protection, and reputation management in an organic manner, prioritizing value creation to build differentiated competitive advantages, achieve sustainable development, and maintain a resilient position in the increasingly intense market competition of the future.

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